



CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

Good morning Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee.

My name is Todd Fedigan, the President of the Connecticut State Police Union and a Master Sergeant within the Connecticut State Police. The State Police Union represents approximately 841 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants and takes great pride in protecting all Connecticut citizens, especially the children within our communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here to speak in **OPPOSITION** of:

RAISED BILL NO. 1095 (Section One 3(B)(ii) Only)

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

The most important function of government is the protection and preservation of life, especially the lives of our children. When parents/guardians send their children to school, they deserve to know our elected leaders and law enforcement are doing everything to ensure our children return home safely each day. School Resource Officers (SRO) work closely with parents/guardians, school administrators and teachers to provide a healthy and safe environment for the students and faculty. School Resource Officers act as defenders, educators, friends, mediators, mentors, and preventors of crime. The majority of families take comfort knowing, if necessary, a police officer can quickly respond and is willing to give their life to protect the life of their child.

This Bill proposes to eliminate School Resource Officers within the public school system and fails to acknowledge the decades of success and benefits the School Resource Officer program has provided to our communities, schools, and our students. Furthermore, this Bill threatens the health and safety of one of the most vulnerable targets in our society. **The presences of School Resource Officers are a strong deterrent for those who seek to harm those who can not defend themselves.** Not only does their presence extend a sense of security to students and staff, but School Resource Officers also provide trainings to staff and assist in drafting emergency operation plans for active shooter situations and lockdowns for threats in the surrounding area. Eliminating Connecticut's School Resource Officer program will weaken the stability and safety of the school environment.

Rather than working with law enforcement to address their concerns and improve the School Resource Officer program, critics continue to propose the elimination of School Resource Officers without considering the possible consequences. Misinformed critics claim School Resource Officers negatively impact students believing they have the ability to enforce a suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary actions. **Opponents fail to understand or disclose that here in Connecticut, our school systems are uniquely designed with counselors, psychologists, social workers, who act as the primary intervenor regarding behavioral issues and administrative sanctions.** Unlike other states, Connecticut School Resource Officers act as partners with school staff and only intervene as a law enforcer when requested and/or absolutely necessary. Often, school principals determine whether there will be a criminal complaint, which is rarely the case unless the student is a chronic offender or poses a safety risk to others. Furthermore, many judges and prosecutors understand that juvenile referrals and criminal arrests should be the last resort in a learning environment.

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All Connecticut law enforcement officers take pride in the protection and preservation of life, but a School Resource Officer's primary focus is to also ensure learning is done in a positive and safe environment. **Safety in our public schools is a fundamental element to students' success in the classroom and they need to understand that police officers are their friends, not their enemy.** The positive interactions with School Resource Officers teach students that they can trust those sworn to serve the public as peace makers, rather than the negativity of what they hear on the news or on social media. Effective School Resource Officers are critical to breaking down barriers within our communities and often leads to helping make communities safer. Unfortunately, the inappropriate conduct of a School Resource Officer from other parts of the country should not be the reason we dismantle our School Resource Officer program here in Connecticut.

In order to have a successful School Resource Officer program, the law enforcement agency's command staff, the school administrators, the Board of Education, and elected leaders need to work collaboratively to make sure only the best candidates are appointed to these critical positions. The most suitable School Resource Officers are those who are compassionate, calm, humorous, reliable, and committed to always having positive interactions which will forever impact the life of a student.

Connecticut legislators and police officers take an oath to protect and preserve life to the best of their ability and we all understand that the life of a child is most important. Maintaining, improving, and creating programs like the position of School Resource Officer is how we honor our oath and promises to our students. **While we are committed to working with the proponents of this Bill to find ways to improve the School Resource Officer program, we do not support the elimination of those you tasked with making sure our students return home safely from school.** The Legislature can send a strong message by rejecting this proposal and work with all stakeholders to find ways to improve the School Resource Officer program and the safety of all students in our public schools.

Based on the foregoing, we respectfully request the Committee not approve this proposed legislation.

March 1, 2023

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Todd Fedigan, President
Connecticut State Police Union